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# SERMON

PREACHED

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# MEDWAY WEST PARISH,

ON THE

# ANNUAL FAST,

APRIL 9, 1829.

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BY JACOB IDE,
Pastor of the Second Church in Medway.

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# SERMON.

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LAMENTATIONS i. 8.

*Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed.*

THE prophet Jeremiah was deeply affected in view of the sins of Israel. The calamities, under which he and they suffered, gave him a more clear and impressive view both of the nature and consequences of sin, than is usually taken by man. When he uttered the words of the text, he seems to have had his eye at once upon their sins, and the calamities which these had occasioned. "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed."

We are not now, as the Israelites were in the days of Jeremiah, suffering under any signal judgments of God. But still it is true that we have sinned, and no less true that the sins of which we are guilty, are attended with many calamities, and that they *expose* us to many others much more distressing and dreadful; so that there is danger of our yet being obliged to accommodate the language of the prophet to ourselves, and say, "America hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed."

It is our sins, and these alone, that render a day of fasting and humiliation necessary. It is for our sins, and in consideration of the evils to which these expose us, that we are this day,

by the constituted authorities of the State, called together, and invited, in unison with our fellow-citizens throughout the Commonwealth, to humble ourselves before God, and to implore his forgiveness and blessing. The text, therefore, and the occasion on which we have assembled, both seem to require us to consider

I. The *sins* of which we, as a people, are guilty.

II. The *evils* which are, or may be, the consequences of these sins.

We cannot on this occasion enumerate particularly *all* the sins of which we are guilty. They are more in number than we can recount. To a few of the most common and important, however, we must direct our attention. The *first* in the selection which I shall make is our *deficiency in vital piety*. As the want of this, or rather that which is directly opposite to this, is the polluted fountain from which flow all the streams of iniquity which are deluging our country, its prevalence demands our serious consideration, and deep humility. That every person ought to be in *heart* a friend to God, a true disciple of Jesus Christ, a lover of devotion, and according to his ability an active promoter of religion, is what no believer in christianity can consistently deny. But how few, comparatively, is the number of such persons? It is a fact which few will dispute, that the people generally in this State are under the influence of that "love of the world which is enmity with God." Comparatively few of them *profess* that love to Christ which the gospel requires; and it is to be feared that the number of his real followers is even less than that of professors. How few there are that appear "to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?" How few to whom "Christ is precious," "the chiefest among ten thousands," and the one "altogether lovely?" How few there are whose hearts and whose treasures appear to be in heaven? How few that give evidence that they are truly the

servants of God, and that his glory is the ultimate object of their pursuit? On the other hand, how many are there who appear to have no true love to God, no true love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and no true regard for the cause of religion? How many to whom devout meditation is a task and prayer a burden? How many to whom the world presents the strongest attractions, while they perceive nothing amiable or glorious in the character of Christ, and in the things pertaining to his kingdom? How many that disregard the *authority* of God, that slight the offers of his grace, and live habitually unmindful both of his threatenings and his promises? But does not this impiety which so much abounds, imply a great degree of wickedness in the sight of God? Is it not a *sin* at which God must be displeased, to choose the world in preference to him, to love the creature more than the Creator, to be engaged in a merely temporal and selfish interest, more than in the cause of God and the salvation of the soul?

2. The neglect of family government and family religion is another sin which very generally and extensively prevails among us. There are numerous families in which no uniform government is maintained, and in which children and domestics are never taught submission to authority; families where the precepts of christianity constitute no part of the order of the house, and where, except in those instances in which the temporal interest of the head is concerned, the will of each is all the law he knows. There are many parents who, while they both instruct and govern their children in regard to things pertaining to their temporal interest, leave them entirely without guidance or direction with respect to the great subject of religion. They give them no instruction respecting God, or the duties which they owe him. They teach them not the turpitude of sin, nor the danger to which this exposes them, nor the method by which salvation from it can be obtained. There are those who take no care that their children may feel the influence of a virtuous and pious example, and who are never anxious that they may

be the subjects of devout and humble prayer. Many families live entirely without prayer. Notwithstanding the intimation in the scriptures "that God will pour out his fury upon the heathen that know him not, and upon the families that call not on his name;" notwithstanding the peculiar encouragement which Christ repeatedly gave to social prayer, and all the examples of the good effects of this duty which they have seen both among ancient and modern saints, there are numerous families which are never found united in calling upon God. Although there is something peculiarly *proper* in the duty of family prayer,—something which approves itself to the reason and conscience of every sober man; yet it is doubtless neglected by more than three quarters of the families in this Commonwealth. There are heads of families, who can receive numerous and signal blessings from the hand of God, and never once unite with their families in giving him thanks. There are families, which in the midst of sickness and death do not bow before the domestic altar to seek relief from him "in whose hands their life and their breath is." There are families which pass through all the vicissitudes of fortune, sometimes in prosperity and sometimes in adversity, sometimes in sickness and sometimes in health, sometimes in joy and sometimes in sorrow; but in none of these circumstances does the head bring his household before God, and with his own mouth acknowledge his hand in what they enjoy or suffer. There are large families of children whose minds are never impressed with the importance of prayer, by the example of their beloved parents. But they grow up without knowing its value or importance, and perhaps with strong prejudices against it, from the circumstance that those whom they most highly respect and ardently love, have never been known to be engaged in the duty. But if family government, and family religion are, as all who believe the scriptures must acknowledge, very plain and important duties, this general neglect of them is a great and heinous *sin*.

3. Another sin which demands our notice in this place, is the neglect of public worship. Although public worship is not

so generally neglected as family worship, yet *this* is neglected by a great number in almost every place. This is a duty which was, with great strictness and solemnity enjoined upon the Jews. It is a duty which received the sanction of our Lord, and his disciples during the time which he continued in the world. After his crucifixion, the Apostles were not only seen in the Jewish synagogues on their sabbath, preaching the kingdom of God to them, but upon the first day of the week they were uniformly together for the purpose of prayer, breaking of bread, and the dispensation of the gospel. Their opinions of the propriety and importance of public worship may be learned not only from their example as here stated, but from the exhortation of Paul to the Hebrews, "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together as the manner of some is." But notwithstanding the plain and unequivocal manner in which this duty is inculcated in the scriptures, and its evident tendency to promote the spiritual welfare of mankind, and the general sentiment of the most reflecting and wise of the world, that its influence upon society is peculiarly salutary, there is a great multitude who neglect it. It is neglected by many whose health and circumstances are the most favorable to their attendance. It is neglected by many who have rising families to witness their conduct and to be influenced by their example. It is neglected by many who have extensive influence in the world, and whose talents and station impose upon them a peculiar obligation to set an example, which is favorable to the institutions of religion, and safe and honorable as a pattern for the imitation of others.

4. Profaneness is a prevailing sin among this people. This is a sin which pervades all classes of the wicked. There are some things in which the fashionable part of the community disdain to imitate the low and the vulgar. But as though there was something in the sin of profaneness, peculiarly fascinating, or peculiarly advantageous, it has become common ground on which the fashionable sinner and the most vulgar of the wicked,

frequently consent to meet and to appear alike. Many, who would feel themselves disgraced to use the *innocent* vulgarisms of the unlettered rustic, daily consent to adopt the very same language in which the meanest clown profanes the name of his Maker. When we consider how little temptation there is to the sin of profaneness, how contrary it is to good taste, and genuine politeness, how it assimilates men of respectable rank and attainments to the most vile and degraded of our race; especially when we consider how plainly it contradicts the Divine command, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain," it appears not a little astonishing that such a sin should ever have gained currency among a civilized and enlightened people. But to our shame, this sin, admitting of no palliation, and committed against the finest feelings of human nature, is extensively and generally prevalent. Many, who in their more reflecting moments, cannot but reprobate the practice both as vulgar and wicked, will, whenever their spirits are a little raised, and their feelings irritated, indulge their depraved hearts in the utterance of the most horrid oaths and imprecations. The youth and children of our land are very generally given to this sin. Many, who have been taught both the folly and wickedness of the practice, are still addicted to it, and disposed to dishonor their parents, and degrade themselves by its continuance. Many are doubtless influenced to commit this heaven-provoking sin, by the example of others whom they have been taught to respect, and they probably continue it under the impression that it gives to their expressions an energy and elevation by which it resembles their superiors.

Under the head of profaneness may, with propriety, be noticed the violations of the Sabbath, so extensive and frequent in this land. Both scripture and reason clearly evince the propriety and importance of having a day set apart for the public worship of God. They also separately and unitedly teach the importance

of this day being regarded as sacred, and devoted exclusively to the purposes of religion. The good *effects* of keeping one day holy to the Lord, which have been apparent wherever this has been the practice, demonstrate also the duty of remembering the Sabbath day. But how is this sacred day at present profaned? How many there are that spend it either in sottish idleness at home, or in business or pleasure abroad? How often do we see persons walking the roads, or rambling the fields for amusement on this holy day? How frequently are teams and carriages, persons on foot and on horseback seen on journeys for secular purposes, when those who are desirous of keeping holy time are going to or returning from the house of God? How many employ the day which God has set apart for himself in visiting in parties of pleasure, or in pursuing in some form or other their ordinary avocations? The laws of the United States authorize the transportation of the Mail, the opening of Post Offices, and the delivery of letters and other papers on the Sabbath. And what is still worse, Congress persists in the continuance of these laws, though petitions have been received for their repeal from men of the first respectability, in almost every part of the United States. While it is truly gratifying to learn that there are so many desirous that the laws of God should no longer be publicly trampled in the dust, it is enough to draw tears from the eye of every christian to consider that our rulers will neither regard the mandates of Heaven nor the voice of the people on this subject.

5. Among the sins which are prevalent in our land, and which seem to require our serious attention to day, are those of falsehood and slander. It cannot have escaped the notice of any well informed and observing person, that the present is a day remarkable for falsehood and detraction. Almost daily some report is in circulation, which after going its rounds, and exciting as it passes, a host of malignant feelings, and calling forth a torrent of abusive language, turns out to be a mere fabrication.

Or if it finally appear that some fact gave rise to the report, it is perhaps found to be totally false in some of its most prominent features, and in all respects greatly exaggerated. How few, comparatively speaking, of those reports which so often obtain circulation and raise an excitement in neighborhoods and towns, are ever found to be true to their full extent? But the circulation of false and exaggerated reports would be of much less consequence, if they were always upon subjects of trifling importance. But how often is personal character concerned in these things? a treasure which may justly be valued more highly than life or fortune. And how often is it the design of false rumors to bring into contempt some *character*, which has become the object of the hatred or the envy of others? The circulation of a false report for *any* purpose betrays an indifference to truth which bespeaks a depraved heart. But the circulation of a false report, with a view to defame the character of another, is indicative not only of an indifference to truth, but of a malignity of feeling, which cannot be too cordially despised or too pointedly reprobated. That reports of this description are industriously circulated at the present day, is a fact too notorious to need any proof. The inhabitants of every town and society, of every village and neighborhood, are witnesses to these things. And few there are either in public or private life, who have not at times suffered under their influence.

6. Another sin which prevails to a great extent among us, and which calls for our humiliation this day is *intemperance*. This is a sin, the extent of which cannot be measured, the guilt of which no language can express, and the consequences of which cannot be calculated. Though an important check has recently been given to this vice, and hopes are excited that an entire and thorough reformation with respect to it, will at length be effected, yet its pestiferous influence is still felt, not only in every town in the State, but in every town in every State in the Union. Many are now becoming its subjects, who once held it in utter

detestation, and looked with pity or contempt upon all who were guilty of it. Many are now falling victims to this worse than brutal vice, who have had the best opportunity of knowing its guilt, and of seeing its tendency exemplified. Many who have the credit of sober, respectable people, are fearlessly travelling the same course, in which thousands of drunkards have been made, and which will doubtless lead them to the same wretched and disgraceful end. So extensively has intemperance prevailed, that old and young, male and female, and more or less of every class of people are found among its unhappy subjects. This vice is not a solitary one. Crimes, as well as calamities, of every name are found in its train. So frequently does it lead to violence and murder, that we can scarcely peruse the contents of a newspaper, without being shocked at the intelligence, that some intoxicated maniac has either taken his own life, or embrued his hands in the blood of his wife or children. And notwithstanding the number and magnitude of the evils both natural and moral, which are produced by the prevalence of intemperance, there are many who affect to despise the efforts which are made to check its progress, and who, although they would not be thought to advocate the vice itself, still contend earnestly for those practices, by which this has been the most successfully promoted. But it ought to be known that the guilt of intemperance is not confined to those who actually get drunk. There are others who are partakers with them in this sin. And among these must be included all who encourage intemperance by distilling, or vending, or using ardent spirits as a common beverage.

7. There is one other sin which it is important to name in this connexion, both on account of its magnitude, and the influence which it has in leading to the commission of numerous others. It is a *shameful disregard of legal obligation*:—a disposition to trample under foot the laws of the land, as well as the laws of God. Unmindful of the blood and treasure by

which our fathers purchased our freedom and independence, ungrateful for the right of suffrage, and the privilege of making their own laws, the people of this Commonwealth, and indeed throughout the Union, have become strangely insensible to the obligations imposed by their own statutes, and regardless of the evils which must inevitably result from their violation. I speak now, not merely of the multitude whose various crimes have made them infamous, but of a class of people who mean to be respected, who lay claims to genuine patriotism, and who do actually exert a very considerable influence in the community. Many of these are guilty of evading and transgressing the laws of the Commonwealth, in a manner which evinces not only a great torpor of conscience, but indifference to the public welfare. A law of this State expressly forbids the retail of ardent spirits or other strong drink by any person without license. It also forbids those who are licensed to sell spirits by *retail* only, to suffer any strong liquors or mixed liquors to be drank in their houses, or any parts or dependencies of the same. The statute says expressly

"If any person licensed to sell wine, beer, ale, cider, brandy, rum, or any strong liquors by retail only, shall be convicted of entertaining, or suffering any person or persons to drink such strong liquors or mixed liquors in their shops, houses, or parts or dependencies of such shops or houses, he shall suffer and incur the like penalty and forfeiture which are inflicted by this law upon persons selling without license, to be recovered and appropriated in the same manner."*

That this is a *good* law, the strict observance of which would have a most excellent effect upon the community, few, if any, will deny. But important as it is acknowledged to be, it is by many openly transgressed, and by many more artfully evaded. There are those who, in defiance of this law, erect their signs, and intentionally draw people to their houses, and obtain their money for intoxicating liquors, when they have no more right to do this than any other, or every other citizen. The boldness

* Laws of Mass. vol. I. p. 299, sect. 4.

with which this has frequently been done within a few years past, and the little notice which has been taken of it by those who ought to guard the morals of the public, clearly shows that there is among our citizens a dangerous insensibility to legal obligations. But the number who openly transgress this law is small compared with those who *evade* it. Many retailers, who will not themselves mix liquor in their stores, and sell it with the same formality with which they sell other goods, will notwithstanding suffer their customers to mix it for themselves, and to make payment in an informal way. They *intend* that their customers shall mix liquor for themselves,—they furnish them with the *means* of doing it, and they actually receive a *compensation* for what is drank in this way. By means of this, and other artful evasions of the law, as much liquor is mixed, and sold, and drank at some stores, as would be if their owners had received a tavern license. And in consequence of this, all the evils designed to be prevented by the license law, are countenanced and promoted.

In another section of the same law, Innholders are forbidden to keep any implements of gaming, or to suffer any persons to gamble in or about their houses.

"No taverner, innholder, or victualler shall have or keep in or about their houses, yards, gardens, or dependencies, any dice, cards, bowls, billiards, quoits, or any other implements used in gaming; nor shall suffer any person or persons resorting unto their houses, to use or exercise any of said games, or any other unlawful game or sport within their said houses or any of the dependencies, as aforesaid, or places to them belonging, on pain of forfeiting the sum of forty shillings for every such offence, upon due conviction thereof, to be disposed of as is herein directed; and every person convicted of playing, as aforesaid, in any such house or dependencies thereof, shall forfeit the sum of twenty shillings to be disposed of as aforesaid."*

Now I am happy to acknowledge that there are innholders in this Commonwealth, who strictly regard this law, and govern their houses accordingly. But I am sorry to be obliged to say,

* Laws of Mass. vol. I. p. 299, sect. 5.

that the number is comparatively few. Though forbidden to keep implements of gaming in or about their houses, there is no other class of people, especially in country towns, that so generally keep them. "This law to the contrary notwithstanding," bowling alleys, and other implements of gaming are more frequently seen at taverns than at any other places in the Commonwealth. There, generally speaking, gamblers more frequently resort than to any other places, and more frequently indulge themselves in those games which the laws forbid. It is affecting to consider that innholders allow of these practices in *defiance* of the laws; for many of them are men who would feel themselves insulted at the suggestion, that they are ignorant of the statutes which respect the government of their houses.

Other vain amusements are by law prohibited at licensed houses.

"*And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid*, That no taverner, innholder, or victualler, shall suffer any dancing, or revelling in his house or the dependencies thereof, as aforesaid, on penalty of thirty shillings, to be paid by the master or keeper of the house who shall suffer the same, and the penalty of six shillings, to be paid by each person offending in any of the said particulars, to be disposed of as aforesaid."*

Another section of the same statute forbids every

"Taverner, innholder, or victualler, to suffer any person to drink to drunkenness, or excess in his or her house, or to suffer any minor (travellers excepted) or servant to sit drinking there, or to have any strong drink there without special allowance of their respective parents, guardians, or masters, on pain of forfeiting the fine of twenty shillings for every offence of that kind, to be appropriated as aforesaid."

A law of a later date provides that

"No vinter, retailer of strong liquors, innholder, or other person keeping a house of public entertainment, shall entertain or suffer any of the inhabitants of the respective towns where they dwell, or others not being travellers, strangers, or lodgers in such houses, to abide and remain in their houses, yards, orchards, or fields, drinking or spending their time either idly or at play, or doing any secular business on the Lord's day, or any part thereof, on penalty of ten shillings, payable by such vinter, retailer, or innholder, or person keeping such house of entertainment, for each person so entertained or suffered; and every person so drinking or abiding (except as aforesaid) shall pay a fine not exceeding ten shil-

* Laws of Mass. vol. I. p. 300, sect. 6.

lings, nor ~~more~~ less than five shillings; and every such licensed person upon any conviction after the first, shall pay a fine of twenty shillings, and having been three times convicted, shall be debarred from renewing his license forever after." *

Now can any person consider for one moment what the laws of the Commonwealth respecting licensed houses are, in connexion with the manner in which they are generally kept, without being struck with the alarming disregard of legal obligation which now prevails. There are, I am happy to acknowledge, a respectable number among the innholders of the Commonwealth, who appear to consider the restrictions which the laws impose, and who cheerfully and honorably submit to them in the government of their houses. But there are many concerning whom this cannot be said. The traveller as he passes through the State, not only finds a bowling alley at, or near most of the public houses, but frequently a collection of idlers in or about them, among whom are often found minors and children, who sit drinking there, exposed to the contagion of intemperance, profaneness, and general dissipation from more experienced adepts in sin. In many places a multitude may be seen at the tavern on the holy Sabbath, spending in idleness or something worse, those consecrated hours which ought, by every one, to be devoted to the private or public worship of God.

At many of the houses, designed by those who made our laws as places of public accommodation, where the people in the vicinity might obtain necessary refreshment on important public occasions, and where travellers might always find a quiet resting place, a crowd is frequently assembled for the purpose of mere pleasure, and the noise of music and dancing is heard from sunset till break of day. At the very places, where the good and wholesome laws of the Commonwealth expressly forbid such amusements, they are practised more frequently than at any other. The men who are under the strongest obligation to have nothing to do with these things, who have virtually

* Laws of Mass. vol. I. p. 407.

*promised* by the oath which they have taken, that they will have nothing to do with them at their own houses, nor suffer others to have, are often the very men who most frequently give them countenance, and fatten on their avails. But great as is the inconsistency of innholders in thus prostituting their license, designed by the laws to secure a quiet and commodious resting place for the weary traveller, to purposes of dissipation and vice, it is not greater than that of those Selectmen, who continue to give their certificate in favor of the approbation of such persons. It is well known that no innholder can have his license renewed, unless the Selectmen of the town, or district to which he belongs, send to the clerk of the peace of the county a certificate of the following import :—

"We the subscribers, selectmen of the town (or district) of ———, do hereby certify that we have maturely considered the returned list of such persons as were licensed the year past, and to the best of our knowledge the following persons named therein have maintained good rule and order in their respective houses and shops, have conformed to the laws and regulations respecting licensed persons, and are firmly attached to the constitution and laws of this Commonwealth."

But this certificate is annually given in behalf of many, who have kept "implements of gaming" in or about their houses the whole year during which they have been licensed, who have permitted "minors to sit drinking there without permission of their parents," who do frequently "suffer dancing and revelling in their houses," and who open their doors to shows and exhibitions of a dangerous, and demoralizing tendency. It is a *common* thing for innholders to obtain a renewal of their license, who openly transgress the laws in some of these respects; and many obtain their license, whose houses are *notorious* places of resort for almost every species of vain amusement and gambling. Now much as it is to be regretted that any innholders should be disposed thus to abuse their license, it is still more to be regretted that a class of citizens, filling so important and respectable a station as that of Selectmen, should support them in this wickedness, by certifying in their favor what is palpably and notoriously

false. If the Selectmen would do their duty on this subject, if they would only do so much of their duty as to refrain from putting their names to a notorious falsehood, the evil would in a great measure be prevented. But how alarming is the state of things, when so important a class of men, as the keepers of our public houses, can habitually violate the laws of the Commonwealth, by suffering dancing, revelling, gambling, and intoxication there; and then, in support of their characters, and as means of renewing and increasing the vices which they have promoted, procure the certificate of the Selectmen of their respective towns, that "they have maintained *good rule and order* in their respective houses and shops, *have conformed to the laws and regulations of licensed persons*, and are firmly *attached to the laws* and constitution of this Commonwealth." There are, indeed, many gentlemen among the Selectmen of our towns, who will not set their names to a certificate of the above description, in favor of an innholder who is known to have violated the laws in the regulation of his house. But it is a lamentable fact, that there are so few of this description, that very many who are habitually guilty of trampling the laws of the Commonwealth under foot, are approved as innholders, and obtain their licenses from year to year. In the opinion of the speaker, this is one of the most fruitful sources of dissipation and vice, that now exists in our land. If there be another that exceeds it, it is the multiplication of licensed houses. On this subject a great weight of responsibility rests upon Selectmen, and it is to be feared a heavy load of guilt lies at their door. The statute, from which copious extracts have been made in this discourse, requires them to certify to the Court of Sessions the number which, in their judgment, the public good requires.

"And it shall be the duty of the Selectmen in the several towns annually to certify to the Court of the General Sessions of the Peace, at the beginning of their term for granting licenses, what number of innholders and retailers in their respective towns, they judge to be necessary for the public good."*

* Laws of Mass. vol. 1. p. 298.

Now I ask, is it possible that it is the serious conviction of the Selectmen of the towns in this Commonwealth, that the *public good* requires so large a number to be engaged in selling ardent spirits as have actually received license? Is it necessary to the public *good*, that in a population of one thousand or fifteen hundred souls, there should be four, five, six, or seven persons legally authorized to sell them spirits? When it is considered what temptations a licensed house or store presents to intemperate drinking, and how often they are actually the means of leading individuals to this dreadful vice, who can believe that a great number of them is necessary to the public *good?* Only consider how many are disposed to spend all their earnings for liquor at these places, while their wives and children are suffering for food and clothing at home;—how often the spirit which is sold here, changes the husband and father into a monster, and the abode of domestic peace into a scene of discord and violence; how often the attractions of these places draw the minds of youth from their proper pursuits, excite their love of pleasure to an immoderate height, and hasten them forward in the paths of dissipation and vice; and say, does the public *good* require that they should be numerous? That the Selectmen should *think* that so many are necessary, is matter of utter astonishment to every person who reflects seriously upon the subject. If they are influenced to certify this, contrary to their serious judgment, it betrays an insensibility to *moral*, as well as legal obligation, which is truly alarming.

In speaking of that disregard to legal obligation which is now a prevailing sin in our land, I have confined myself to these familiar cases which come within the observation of all, and which appear to me very strikingly to illustrate it. It ought, however, to be observed, that these are only a few among thousands of instances by which it might be illustrated with equal clearness. Though our citizens enjoy the privilege of making their *own* laws,—a privilege purchased for them by the

blood of their fathers,—a privilege in which they feel themselves exalted above every other people, and often celebrate in loud acclamations of joy, yet they do shamefully disregard their own statutes, especially those which respect the promotion of sound morality, and treat them in a manner which is suited to expose them to the contempt of their posterity and the world. The men who are so much disposed to disregard them, are generally found violently opposed to their execution. We often hear, even from the lips of those who profess to be warm friends to government, a loud and bitter cry against any attempts to execute these laws. Virtuous citizens are reproached and even threatened, for the efforts which they make to influence others to regard the laws. In many places, a citizen can do nothing which will more certainly draw upon him the imputation of a thirst for power, a disposition to oppress, or act the tyrant, than to speak and act in favor of those measures which the good and wholesome laws of the Commonwealth explicitly require. It is actually becoming fashionable not only to transgress those of our statutes which respect the promotion of order and good morals in the community, but to oppose, and reproach, and slander the men who would carry them into execution. On this account, magistrates are strongly tempted to neglect their duty, and the people generally to wink at vices which must inevitably carry desolation and ruin in their train. The same cause, it is to be feared, too often influences ministers of the gospel to be silent on subjects, on which the word of God requires they should speak. They are expressly commanded to inculcate upon their people obedience to the laws. "Put them in mind," says Paul to Timothy, "to be subject to principalities and powers; to obey magistrates, and to be ready unto every good work." But it is well known that there is little said from the pulpit at the present time, to inculcate obedience to the laws of the land. And the reason probably is, that every minister feels that he can hardly do this without the imputation of political

motives. But if the state of things is such, that people are disposed to transgress their own laws, that magistrates are unwilling to attempt their execution, and that public teachers of morality and religion think it prudent to have little or nothing to say on such a subject, are we not in an alarming condition? This leads me to the other branch of my subject which is to consider

II. The *evils* which are, or may be, the consequences of our sins.

I have not attempted to enumerate all the *sins* which prevail among us. Nor shall I here attempt to enumerate all their *evil consequences*. A few of the most important only will be noticed. Among these, the first that offers itself for our consideration is the *obstacles*, which the present prevalence of sin throws in the way of the reformation of the guilty. Iniquity so abounds, that in many of its forms, it has become *fashionable*. Those, therefore, who see the errors of their ways, and feel their obligation to alter their course, see at the same time that they cannot do this without going against the current. The thought of this is painful and discouraging, and presents before them a strong temptation to close their eyes again to their guilt and danger, and to flatter themselves with the vain hope of safety while they continue in the way of the multitude. With that class of people who peculiarly need reforming, fashion has an influence which is little less than irresistible. There are few things which they dread so much as the thought of being singular. The general prevalence of iniquity in our land will, therefore, exert a powerful influence to prevent their reformation. It will keep constantly before them numerous and powerful temptations to continue in their own chosen way. They will be supported in this, by many examples, and examples too of those whom they are most inclined to respect. They will be supported in this by the numerous and plausible arguments of the wicked, to which they are strongly inclined to listen, and the falsehood and sophistry of which they are little disposed to detect. Add to all this, they are constantly forming *habits* of vice, which are daily strengthening

by indulgence, and incorporating themselves with their most common principles of action. This view of their condition is truly affecting. It naturally leads us to fear, that many of them will *never* reform; that the serious impressions which have been or may be made upon their minds, will all at length be erased; that the good resolutions which they are led from time to time to form will continue to be broken; and that all the efforts which the friends of morality and religion may make to reclaim them will be unavailing. We cannot, my friends, *avoid* seeing in the present general prevalence of iniquity, an influence exerted upon every man who is destitute of piety, to *keep* him destitute; upon every one who neglects family government and family religion to lead him to *continue* to neglect these duties; upon every one who neglects public worship to keep him *still* from the courts of the Lord; upon every one who profanes the name and institutions of his God to *remain* in his inexcusable practice; upon every one who is given to slander and backbiting to *prevent* any essential alteration in his conduct; upon every intemperate person to *prolong* that self-indulgence which has so strongly attached him to his cup, and upon all those who disregard the laws of the land to *persist* in their inconsistent and criminal course. But we thank God that they are not entirely beyond the reach of motives suited to exert an opposite influence. We rejoice that their hearts are in his hands and that he can turn them as the rivers of waters are turned. In him alone do we rest our hope of their reform.

2. In consequence of the general prevalence of iniquity, which we have been led to notice, many who are now comparatively free from external wickedness, are in danger of being drawn into open and ruinous vices. Vices, like diseases of the body, are often *contagious*. Such is the influence which one person exerts upon another, that when the number of the vicious is great, they invariably communicate their character to many more. If "*one* sinner destroyeth much good," what must we

expect will be the influence of a great multitude? This will be, not only to prevent each other's repentance and reformation, but to draw many others into the same courses of iniquity which they are pursuing. Nothing is more natural to man than to follow a multitude to do evil. We have reason to believe, that many who have been taught to use the name of God with reverence, and who now fear to utter a profane oath, will yet by the example of the profane around them, be influenced boldly "to take the name of the Lord in vain;"—that many, who now refrain from all secular business and pleasure upon the Sabbath, will yet through the influence of those who fear not God, be partakers in the grossest profanations of this sacred day;—that many who now regard the public worship of God both as a duty and a privilege, and regularly attend upon the ministration of the word, will yet be numbered with those who are never seen within the walls of the sanctuary; that many who now make but a moderate use of ardent spirits, who abhor intemperance, and despise those that indulge themselves in this vice, will yet themselves drink to excess and suffer the same disgrace and wretchedness which they have so often deplored in others;—that many who now feel the force of legal obligation, and cheerfully submit to "the powers that be," will yet, in other circumstances and under the influence of other associates, practically disregard the good and wholesome laws of the land, and violently assail the characters, if not the persons, of those who shall attempt their execution. Many of those, who are now guilty of all the vices here described, were once free from them all. And the principal means by which they have been drawn into their present evil courses, is the influence of those who have gone before them in these things. So long, therefore, as "iniquity abounds" and examples of vice are presented by great numbers of every rank in society, it is morally certain that many who are now comparatively free from external wickedness, will yet be drawn into open and ruinous sins. In this view of the

subject parents have reason to tremble for their children.—Though they may have succeeded in their religious and moral instruction so far as to preserve them hitherto from immorality, and though they now enjoy the satisfaction of seeing them rising into notice with fair, unblemished characters, promising honor to their families and usefulness in the world, yet they cannot but perceive in the wickedness which prevails in the land, an influence which may blast their fondest hopes, and bring down their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. With hearts naturally inclined to evil, their children are in a world of temptation. They live in a land and at an age in which vice is *fashionable*, in which it is recommended under the specious names of virtue, and in which some of its grossest forms are sanctioned by the names and the arguments of many, who take rank with the learned and the great. To say they are in danger is to tell but half the truth. They are in *imminent* danger. They are amidst the rocks on which thousands before them have foundered, and near the gulph in which they have gone down to be seen no more.

3. The present prevalence of sin among us is preparing the way for a more rapid increase of iniquity among the wicked themselves. Their progress is like that of a heavy body down a declivity: the farther it rolls, the more rapid becomes its motion. Every step which they take prepares them for another and a longer stride. A single sinner, amidst a virtuous population, will make but slow progress in a course of open wickedness. He feels the restraint of example from every side. He is checked in his progress by the instruction, advice, and entreaties of virtuous friends. He has none to suggest to him new schemes of wickedness, and none to aid him in the execution of those which his own heart may devise. But how different is his movement, when surrounded by a multitude of kindred spirits? Their example, their advice, the new plans which they suggest, and the aid which they proffer, all combine to encourage and strengthen him. Now consider, my friends, how

numerous the wicked of every description have become, and see what facilities this circumstance affords them in their downward course; how much more rapidly they are prepared to go, than they would be, if they were few or alone. To assist your conceptions on this subject, consider for a moment the case of a young man who has so far lost his reverence for the Sabbath, as to be disposed to spend it in pleasure. If he were alone in his purpose, encircled by those only who consecrate the day to God, this would probably fail him. He can hardly be supposed to have resolution enough to persevere in his heaven provoking purpose, in opposition to the example of all around him, seconded as it doubtless would be by the rebukes of his own conscience. The solitariness of his situation also, should he separate from those who keep holy time, and go in pursuit of his sinful pleasures, would probably discourage him from any open profanation of the day. But how different in fact are the circumstances of one disposed to spend the Sabbath in pleasure at the present time. He is surrounded with many others whose hearts are upon the same object, and who are ready to accompany him in the pursuit of it. They are mutually encouraged and strengthened by each other's counsel, and example. If they are destitute of the means necessary to the accomplishment of their sinful purpose, there are enough ready to aid and abet them. There are owners of horses, and carriages, and boats, sufficiently destitute of the fear of God, and regardless of the Sabbath, cheerfully to provide the means of conveyance for those who wish to ride or sail on this holy day. And at almost any place to which they may be disposed to go, they may find those who are ready and willing to accommodate parties of pleasure, and a sufficient number to unite with them in their diversions. And should they feel themselves reproved by the example of others, whom they may see going to, or returning from the house of God, they may generally quiet their consciences, by reflecting that such men as Lafayette and the

President of the United States, and many others whom the world delight to honor, frequently ride on the Sabbath. If any of their pious friends censure their conduct as impious and profane, they can easily assail them with the charge of bigotry and superstition, and obtain the reiteration of this from a hundred tongues around them.

Now the general prevalence of sin encourages, and strengthens *all* the wicked, essentially in the same way as it does those who profane the Sabbath. It is to be expected, therefore, that there will be a great increase of iniquity among the wicked themselves. Many moral sinners will probably become openly vicious. Many of those who now neglect the worship of God in their families will soon cease to visit his courts on the Sabbath, and cast off all the forms of religion. Some of those who now profane the Sabbath occasionally, will soon disregard it altogether, and having cast off the restraints of this sacred day, they will rapidly progress in that course of vice and crime which has brought so many to a wretched and disgraceful end. Those who now occasionally indulge themselves in the sin of intemperance will no doubt soon become confirmed drunkards. Many who are now in a course of fashionable dissipation, will soon be found among the degraded and miserable victims of intemperance and debauchery. Not a few who now venture to violate the laws of the land, whenever they think they can do it with safety and advance their interest by it, may be expected yet to venture upon measures which may cost them their liberty or lives. It is to be feared that among the great multitude who now begin to sneer at religion and to revile its professors, there will yet arise a host of open and bold opposers to the gospel of Christ.

4. The present general prevalence of sin among us exposes us as a people to heavy calamities. The natural consequence of vice is misery. Thousands of families, and tens of thousands of individuals are now the subjects of severe sufferings in consequence of their own sins, and those of others with whom they

are connected. The single vice of intemperance, which is only one in the "*Legion*," with which our land is infested, produces a degree of wretchedness which no language can adequately describe. This and the natural evils produced by the prevalence of other vices are a calamity to us as a people, because they are an evil felt in a greater or less degree by all, and because they are an abridgment of the sum of happiness, which we might otherwise enjoy. But the calamities which are now suffered in consequence of the prevalence of sin among us are few, and small, compared with those with which we are threatened. It is universally acknowledged, that a republican government like ours, cannot long be supported without the general prevalence of virtue among the people. Let the sins of which I have spoken be increased, until the mass of our population is corrupted, and the foundation on which our government rests is swept away. All other republics have fallen for the want of virtue in the people to support them. The very same sins, by which the citizens of other countries have been corrupted, and which have proved the ruin of every other government on earth that has borne a resemblance to our own, are now extensively prevailing, and constantly gaining ground in our land. In addition to all their other sins, which are gradually undermining the foundation of our government, our citizens are growing regardless of their *own laws*. After they have fought for the privilege of making them, after they have been at the *expense* of making them, and even while they are boasting of their excellence, they grow impatient of the restraints they impose, and throw them off as a yoke of bondage. Men who would be considered as friends to order and good government, who pride themselves in their patriotism, who have themselves been engaged in making our laws, and who profess to be ready to take up arms in defence of the rights and liberties they are designed to protect, are often to be seen among the number who trample them under their feet, and defy the power that shall carry them

into execution. Now whether it is a fact, that the other sins of which I have spoken tend to the ruin of our government or not, there can be no question in regard to this. Arguments are not necessary to show that a people, who will not submit to the restraints of their own laws, but unhesitatingly throw them off, whenever they come in competition with a present selfish interest, cannot long govern themselves. Let this spirit generally prevail among our citizens, and we shall soon present to the world the dreadful spectacle of a people pulling down the temple of liberty with their own hands, and burying themselves in its ruins.

But it becomes us here to consider, that our sins are provoking the displeasure of God, and that unless repented of and forsaken, they will surely draw down his judgments upon us. That he is determined to chastise the nations of the earth, when they disregard his authority and persevere in their sins, is a truth which may be learned both from his own declarations and the history of his providence. When he asked in reference to the provocations which he had received from the Jews, "Shall I not visit for these things? and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" he did virtually declare that he would not only visit *that* nation in his anger, but every other people who should follow their steps. The dreadful judgments which he brought upon Sodom and Gomorrah, upon Tyre and Sidon, Babylon and Nineveh, as well as those with which he repeatedly visited his own chosen people, explain the fearful import of his threatening to visit the nations for their sins. It is well known to every attentive reader of the scriptures, that Israel's long captivity in Babylon and the sufferings of the nation, which attended this humiliating and painful event, were a judgment of God upon them for their sins. In the text, Jeremiah speaks of the sins of Jerusalem, as the occasion of her desolation, "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore, she is removed." Now if any one will give himself the trouble to

search out the sins, for which God so often reproved Israel, and for which he at length gave them as captives for seventy years into the hands of their enemies, and then consider what are the sins which are now becoming the most prevalent in this land, he will see that they are in some respects the same, and in others very similar. This resemblance I cannot stop to trace. But I will here just remind you, that the profanation of the Sabbath, which is increasing with a fearful rapidity among us, and which to a certain extent is now required by the laws of our general government, is one thing which Nehemiah names as the cause of their long and doleful captivity. After he had returned, and repaired the broken walls of Jerusalem, and begun to establish again the ordinances of the Lord among the people, he found there a class of men who transacted their secular business on the Sabbath. These he sharply reproves, and declares that this profanation was the cause of their past sufferings, and that it would, if continued, certainly renew them. "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, what evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

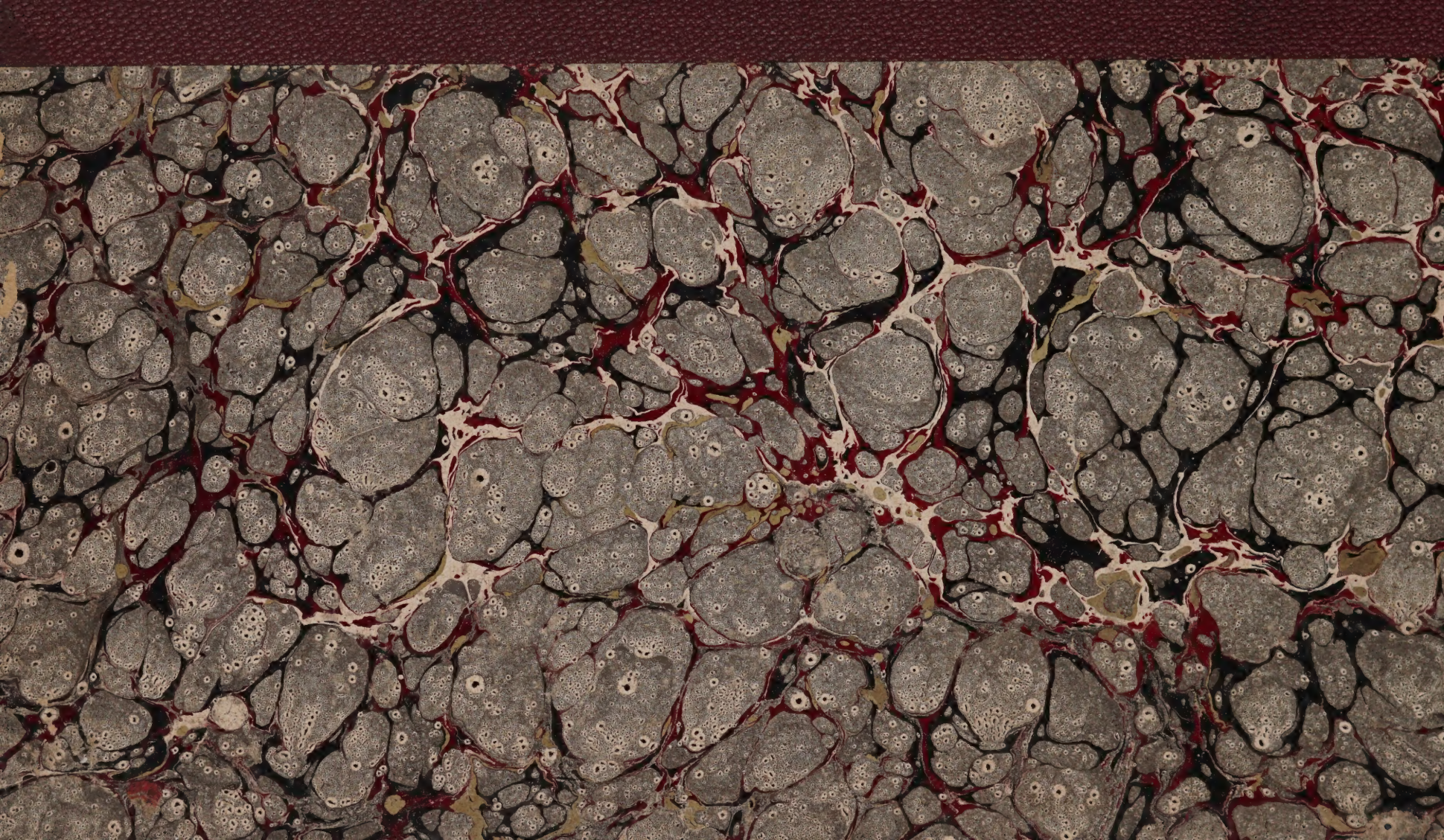
Our sins do unquestionably expose us to the judgment of God. They are essentially the same, for which he has visited, and for which he has destroyed other nations. If we continue to progress in them, we cannot escape. Among the dreadful ministers of his vengeance are the sword, the pestilence, and the famine. With these he may soon make desolate the fair portion of our inheritance. The future increase, and wealth, and glory of our nation, so generally anticipated, so often the orator's favorite theme, and the common subject of congratulation among all the friends of our country, may be a dream.

But if the evils consequent upon our sins ended with this life, they would be comparatively small. This, however, is not the fact. I am obliged, therefore, to add

5. That they expose the individuals who commit them to endless punishment in another world. In the judgments brought upon nations, individuals do not suffer in exact proportion to their deserts. Here the innocent suffer with the guilty, and it often happens that the sufferings of the former are greater than that of the latter. But a time is coming when "God will render to every man *according* to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality; *eternal life;* but unto them who are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile." This is an event, which, as the Apostle informs us is to take place, "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel." The punishment to be inflicted upon the wicked, it is to be noticed, is here placed in contrast with "eternal life," and it is in other passages expressly said, to be "everlasting," "eternal," "forever and ever."*

How affecting then is the prevalence of sin in our land! It is carrying temporal ruin to thousands. It threatens to deprive us of our dearest rights and privileges, both civil and religious. Its evil consequences reach beyond the grave, and involve the endless perdition of the impenitent transgressor. Let every one who is partaker in this guilt, be aware of his danger, and escape, before "the overflowing scourge shall pass through" the land, or a summons from his Judge call him to his final account. It is "fools only who make a mock at sin," or trifle with its tremendous consequences. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself: but the simple pass on and are punished."

If ever a people had reason to fast, and pray, and humble themselves before the Lord for their sins, this duty belongs to

* Matt. xxv. 46; 2 Thess. i. 9; Mark iii. 29; Rev. xiv. 11.

us to day. It becomes us seriously to *consider* our sins, to acknowledge them publicly before the Lord, and to plead with him that they may not prove our ruin. The truth that he is able to change the hearts of men, that he can, if he please, turn back this overwhelming current of iniquity which is now deluging our country, and that he is pleased to make such displays of his power and grace in answer to the prayers of his people, is our encouragement. Let then this fast be sanctified. Let the solemn assemblies which are called together to day, the elders and the people, the parents and the children, the bridegroom from his chamber, and the bride out of her closet, "turn unto the Lord with all their heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and mourning."—"Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, *Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach.*"